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## Nominee Says She'd Skip Harvard Case

By Jessica Gresko and  
Mark Sherman

Associated Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP)—Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson said Wednesday that if confirmed to the Supreme Court she'd sit out an affirmative action lawsuit over Harvard's admission policies because she is a member of the school's board.

But the court has a potential workaround that could still allow Jackson, the first Black woman nominated to the Supreme Court, to play a role in the court's consideration of a dispute that could lead to the end of the use of race in college admissions.

Still, her vote is not expected to be pivotal on a court with a 6-3 conservative majority that is skeptical of the role of race in education, voting and other areas.

The court announced in Janu-

ary it would hear the affirmative action case, which involves Harvard, which is private, and the University of North Carolina, which is public. But with their calendar already full for this term, the justices said the case wouldn't be argued until some time after the court begins its new term in October. A decision in the case would be expected before June 2023.

Because Justice Stephen Breyer, whom Jackson has been nominated to replace, intends to retire when the court begins its summer recess, she would be on the court in time to hear the case.

The issue is not that Jackson attended Harvard both as an undergraduate and for law school but that she now sits on the school's Board of Overseers, which is made up of alumni and is one of Harvard's two governing bodies. She was asked during the second day of questioning at

her confirmation hearing by Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas whether she intended to recuse herself from the case.

"That is my plan, senator," said Jackson, who has been on the board since 2016 and whose six-year term ends this year. Cruz himself went to Princeton and attended Harvard law school at the same time as Jackson.

Still, just because Jackson intends to recuse herself from the Harvard case does not mean she couldn't be part of a major affirmative action decision. Right now the Harvard and North Carolina cases are linked. The court could separate the two cases, giving Jackson the chance to take part in the arguments and the decision in the North Carolina case while sitting out the one from Harvard.

Something similar happened

(See **HARVARD CASE**, P. 2)



## Democratic Gains Might Not Last Long

By Nicholas Riccardi

Associated Press

DENVER, Colo. (AP)—The surprising advantage Democrats gained during the torturous process of rewriting the nation's congressional maps may be short-lived, creating the potential for more frequent clashes over how political power should be distributed across the United States.

As the once-a-decade scramble to draw new legislative lines, a process known as redistricting, nears its conclusion, Democrats have succeeded in shifting the congressional map to the left. The typical U.S. House district now comes close to matching President Joe Biden's 4 percentage point win in 2020. Though the impact may not be seen in this year voting, as Democrats face uphill odds to maintain their House majority, party leaders believe the new maps would make it easier to take the chamber in more favorable elections.

But all that could change.

Two major states—North Carolina and Ohio—are already poised to redraw their maps in the next few years. Several cases at the U.S. Supreme Court, meanwhile, could dramatically alter the rules that govern mapmaking nationwide. Those twists could ultimately transform redistricting into a regular political brawl that consumes state capitals already gripped by partisan tensions.

"This is the end of Act I, but there's a lot more to come in the play," said Michael Li of the Brennan Center for Justice, which tracks redistricting.

The uncertainty extends to other facets of elections, from the ability to challenge certain voting restrictions in court to whether minorities can have a chance to elect their preferred representatives. But it also leaves a significant asterisk over one of the biggest political twists of the past few years.

Many Democrats began the redistricting cycle haunted by what happened after the Repub-

lican wave in 2010. The following year, after the U.S. Census Bureau released its new population count, the GOP had control of drawing new legislative lines in a large number of states, shifting the national congressional map to the right. Democrats worried the same thing would happen in 2021, after the once-a-decade population update.

Republicans, however, had maxed out their gains in many places and turned to shoring up incumbents more than trying to make new seats winnable. Democrats still had far fewer districts to draw than the GOP but controlled more states than in 2011. In those that they did control, Democrats drew aggressive maps to maximize the number of seats they could win.

Republicans and many analysts note that, in doing so, Democrats effectively spread out their voters, making themselves vulnerable to shifts in political coalitions or bad election cycles, as 2022 is expected to be for the party. Still, Democrats say

they're satisfied. They count 12 congressional seats that they have shifted into the "likely Democratic" category—though that includes some districts Democrats already represent.

Republicans say they are also happy with how they did. Adam Kincaid, executive director of the National Republican Redistricting Trust, said the party has so far shifted 16 GOP-held seats from being in competitive districts to safely Republican ones. That, he argues, will free up millions of dollars to go after vulnerable Democrats.

"We are exactly in most states where we thought we would be," Kincaid said. The biggest surprise, he added, is that "Democrats, where they had control, they went wild."

A couple of significant wild cards remain, with five states lacking official maps.

Florida hasn't finalized its map, stuck in a standoff between Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis

(See **GAINS**, P. 2)



CAROLINA CRUSHES SAINT PETER'S, WILL MEET DUKE IN FINAL FOUR

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — America's favorite underdog, Saint Peter's, shouldn't feel all that bad. North Carolina has crushed lots of dreams over the decades.

The Tar Heels ended all hope of a March Madness miracle in the early going Sunday, getting 20 points and 22 rebounds from Armando Bacot in a wire-to-wire 69-49 runaway over 15th-seeded Saint Peter's. No. 8 seed Carolina (28-9) made its record 21st Final Four, and this one will be a scene like no other. Next Saturday in New Orleans, it's North Carolina vs. archrival Duke and its soon-to-be-retiring coach, Mike Krzyzewski. Three short weeks ago, the Tar Heels fractured a different sort of fairy tale — Coach K's final home game — in a 94-81 beatdown of the Blue Devils at Cameron Indoor Stadium.

"We want Duke! We want Duke! We want Duke!" the Tar Heels fans shouted as the team cut down the nets in Philly, the same city where Carolina won the East region back in 2016.

"I don't think anything can be as crazy as the buildup to that game over in Cameron," coach Hubert Davis said. "We just keep our eyes straight ahead and we ignore all the noise."

### POLICE: OFFICER FINDS 2 STRUGGLING OVER GUN, FIRES SHOTS

BURLINGTON (AP)—Two men were taken to medical facilities early Wednesday after a North Carolina police officer responding to a report of an intruder found them struggling over a gun and fired shots, police said.

Burlington police officers were called to a home on South Sellers Mill Road after 4 a.m. by a resident who reported finding an intruder acting erratically, police said in a news release.

Officers found two residents, a man and a woman, leaving the home, followed by a man who tackled the male resident, then struggled with him over a firearm, police said. Officers identified themselves and when the pair didn't comply with their orders, an officer fired. The resident and suspect were injured and taken to the hospital. The male resident was treated and released Wednesday for injuries consistent with an assault. The suspect remained hospitalized with gunshot wounds not believed to be life-threatening.

Investigators believe that in addition to shots fired by the officer, shots were also fired by either the residents or the suspect, police said.

Burlington Police and the North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation are investigating the incident. Two officers involved have been placed on administrative leave pending a routine internal investigation, Assistant Chief of Police Chris Gaddis said in an email. The department is not releasing the races of the people involved at this time, Gaddis said.

### NC AUDIT: VIRUS BUSINESS RELIEF PROGRAM LACKS MONITORING

A North Carolina-based nonprofit foundation that received \$83 million to lend to small businesses struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic did not create procedures to ensure the public money was used properly, state auditors said Wednesday.

The performance audit by State Auditor Beth Wood's office declared Golden LEAF failed to monitor the federal coronavirus relief funds the General Assembly sent to the foundation in spring 2020 for the foundation's COVID-19 Rapid Recovery Loan Program. The foundation's top leader took issue with the findings.

Golden LEAF contracted with and provided funding to the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center to operate the program. More than 1,250 loans were initiated. Companies could borrow up to \$250,000, which could be used for business items like salaries, rent and utilities. Loan terms can't exceed 10 years.

(See **HOUSING**, P. 2)

(See **STATE BRIEFS**, P. 2)

## Affordable Housing Gets Federal Boost

BOSTON (AP) — After her home flooded five times in the past year, Tilicia Owens was on edge with every impending storm and ready to leave her Detroit neighborhood behind.

But then the 40-year-old quality engineer heard the city had a program that could prevent heavy rains from inundating her basement and damaging her furniture, photos and exercise equipment. The city is tapping \$2.5 million in federal stimulus money as part of a \$15 million effort to provide pumps and other equipment to help prevent flooding in 11 neighborhoods.

"That would mean the world to me," said Owens, who has applied to the city's Basement Backup

Protection Program, which would provide homeowners a pump to remove floodwaters or a valve outside the home to prevent water from entering.

"I have invested so much into my home," she added. "I want to protect that and I want to protect my investment. It would take away all my anxiety."

Detroit has turned to the \$350 billion in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds to partly finance the project. Part of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan approved last year, the money is meant to help communities recover from the pandemic and can be used for everything from job creation to child care to housing.

More than 60 states, counties and cities, including Detroit, are tapping the funds for housing programs.

With President Joe Biden's Build Back Better bill floundering and federal Emergency Rental Assistance running out in some places, the funds have become a critical source of money to address a shortage of affordable housing and a growing homelessness crisis. Prioritizing housing is also a reminder that the long-running shortage of affordable housing, especially in communities of color, has worsened during the pandemic, a time when a looming eviction crisis and rising housing prices threatened millions of families.

"There was already growing awareness before the pandemic in states and cities around the country that affordable housing problems that always existed were reaching an all time level and just had to be addressed," said Stockton Williams, the executive director of the National Council of State Housing Agencies. "The pandemic has shown a brighter light on that, especially as they relate to the most vulnerable renters and homeowners."

For many communities, the amount of money available in the state and local fiscal recovery funds is also historic and more than many have spent on housing in a year or even a decade. "This is certainly transformational funding," Jacqueline Edwards, the director of the Maricopa County Human Services Department in Arizona, said of the nearly \$85 million it has to spend on everything from new housing to additional shelter beds to helping homeowners repair their air conditioning and stay in their homes when temperatures heat up. Typically, the county has a few million dollars to spend each year on these services.

"We'll be able to make significant changes, not just that will impact today, but will impact lives for years to come," she added. But advocates say it still is only a start and significant federal investment — much of it in the Build Back Better bill, passed by the House but currently held up in the Senate — is necessary to fix the problem.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 1 in 4 families eligible for federal rental assistance received it before the pandemic. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates that \$86 billion annually is needed over the next decade for universal housing vouchers and



Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan listens to Tilicia Owens talk in her basement Friday, Feb. 18, 2022, in Detroit. After her home flooded five times in the past year, Owens was on edge with every impending storm and ready to leave her Detroit neighborhood behind. But then the 40-year-old quality engineer heard the city had a program that could prevent heavy rains from inundating her basement and damaging her furniture, photos, trophies and exercise equipment. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya)

# Nominee Says She'd Skip Harvard Case—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in 2020, when Justice Sonia Sotomayor discovered a conflict in a dispute from two states over presidential electors. The court abandoned plans to hear them together and eventually issued its major decision in the case in which all the justices participated.

Federal law requires all judges to recuse from cases in which

they have a financial interest, took part in the case at an earlier stage or have a close relative as a party.

Both the question of recusing from certain cases and questions about affirmative action are common topics at Supreme Court confirmation hearings. Affirmative action has been a standard topic particularly after

a 2003 Supreme Court decision that predicted affirmative action wouldn't be necessary in 25 years. The high court has taken up affirmative action cases since then but left the earlier case standing. Since then, how-

ever, the court has grown more conservative with the addition of three justices appointed by President Donald Trump, and it appears more likely there are the votes to overrule the 2003 case.

If Jackson is confirmed, the

court will have four members that attended Harvard for law school, the same number as it does now. Breyer, whom Jackson would replace and for whom she worked early in her legal career, also attended Harvard. Chief

Justice John Roberts, Justice Elena Kagan and Justice Neil Gorsuch also attended Harvard, Roberts both as an undergraduate and for law school. None of the other justices has any current role with the university.

## STATE BRIEFS

Continued from page 1

Auditors said that while recipients initially had to certify that they qualified for the loan and would limit its use to business needs, Golden LEAF did not perform procedures to ensure compliance. That could include requiring borrowers to provide spending reports or verifying such spending independently, according to the audit.

Without such monitoring, Wood's office wrote, there was increased risk that proceeds could be misused, and Golden LEAF would be limited in knowing whether the program achieved the legislature's intended results.

In a written response attached to the audit, Golden LEAF chief executive Scott Hamilton disagreed with a recommendation that the program's loan proceeds be monitored. Hamilton cited the borrower certification process already in place, and that businesses have to make records regarding proceed use available upon request. Requiring businesses to submit loan use reports is unusual in small-business lending, he wrote, and additional administrative duties likely would have discouraged some businesses from participating.

In turn, the auditors responded to Hamilton, writing that Golden LEAF's "response included statements that mislead the reader."

### US AGREES TO LIFT TAXES ON BRITISH STEEL, ALUMINUM

The United States has agreed to lift tariffs on British steel and aluminum, mending a rift between allies that dates back to the Trump administration.

At a meeting last Tuesday in Baltimore, the U.S. and the U.K. announced a deal that would remove taxes on British steel and aluminum that comes in below new quotas on the imports. The British agreed to lift retaliatory tariffs on U.S. exports, including whiskey.

In 2018, President Donald Trump imposed tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum, calling the foreign metals a threat to U.S. national security—a move that outraged the British, Europeans and other longstanding American allies. Although President Joe Biden had criticized Trump for alienating America's friends, he was slow once taking office to undo the metals tariffs, popular in the politically important steel-producing states.

Last year, the Biden administration reached a deal with the European Union, agreeing to drop the tariffs on EU metals that come in below new import quotas and continuing to tax imports that exceed them.

Critics said all along that Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs did little to address the real problem confronting American producers of steel and aluminum: overproduction by China. But the United States already shuts out most Chinese steel.

Under the agreement announced Tuesday, Chinese-owned steel companies in Britain must undergo annual audits to ensure that cheap Chinese steel can't slip into the United States tariff free.

American whiskey producers welcomed the resolution to the trade standoff.

"Distillers throughout the United States are cheering the end of this long tariff nightmare," Chris Swonger, CEO of the Distilled Spirits Council, said in a statement.

### WILLIAM PEACE UNIVERSITY RECONSIDERS NAME, SLAVEHOLDER TIES

A small private college in North Carolina is considering a name change amid scrutiny of its namesake's history as a slaveholder.

William Peace University President Brian Ralph told media last Tuesday that the school will hold a series of "listening sessions" with faculty, staff, students, alumni and others on whether to rename the school, among other questions.

Ralph's remarks came as the university released findings from a task force that reviewed the school's historical ties to slavery and White supremacy.

The task force found that Peace owned more than 50 slaves, according to data from an 1860 census.

The school said Tuesday that its Board of Trustees voted to remove a statue of Peace on campus.

The campus in Raleigh has an enrollment of more than 800 and is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church.

### OVERDOSE DEATHS CLIMB IN NORTH CAROLINA IN 2020

Overdose deaths in North Carolina increased by 40 percent in 2020 and continue to be on the rise.

The state Department of Health and Human Services announced the data Monday. It counted more than 3,300 deaths from overdoses—that's roughly nine per day. That's also nearly 1,000 more deaths than in 2019.

A full tally of overdose deaths in 2021 is not complete, but preliminary data shows a continued increase.

More than 70 percent of fatal overdoses in 2020 involved fentanyl, an illicit opioid.

State officials say the data in North Carolina mirrors national trends.

# Dem Gains Might Not Last—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and the GOP-controlled Legislature over how aggressively to expand their party's hold on the state's congressional delegation.

Ohio's maps are in limbo as the state Supreme Court repeatedly strikes them down as illegal, pro-GOP gerrymanders, or misshapen maps drawn to help one party rather than represent communities.

The GOP is fuming over court intervention in places like Ohio that have helped Democrats, and that's one reason there could be a decadelong redistricting cycle.

Complex litigation over redistricting often drags on for years, sometimes leading to courts ordering new maps. Last decade, Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Texas all had GOP-drawn maps thrown out by courts and new ones ordered.

But legal experts say this cycle may be shaping up to be even more tumultuous and far-reaching.

That's because the conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court has signaled its interest in changing some longtime standards that have governed redistricting.

"Their holdings may impact all 50 states in ways that holdings in 2011 didn't," Doug Spencer, a law professor at the University of Colorado-Boulder, said of the high court.

The first case the Supreme Court took was a challenge to Alabama's Republican-drawn maps last month. A lower court panel cited the Voting Rights Act in ruling that the GOP had to make a second district with enough Democratic-leaning Black voters

that they could pick their own representatives without being blocked by Whites who vote for the other party. The high court's conservative majority put that ruling on hold, saying it may revise its longtime rules for handling majority-minority districts next year.

Then, last week, the court rejected a GOP appeal of rulings by North Carolina and Pennsylvania's state Supreme Courts that adopted maps Republicans disliked. But four conservative justices—the minimum number required to hear a case—signaled they wanted to rule on the legal theory underlying the challenges, which holds that state legislatures have supreme power in making rules for congressional elections.

There's a wide range of ways

the high court could decide both cases, but that already adds uncertainty to a combustible, hyperpartisan environment likely to lead North Carolina and Ohio to redraw their maps later this decade, representing 29 House seats. The unsettled nature of the debate in both states is due to litigation over Republican-drawn maps.

In North Carolina, after a Democratic majority on the state Supreme Court struck down the GOP maps in a 4-3 vote, Republicans vowed to flip the court to their control in November. Indeed, when a lower court panel sketched out a new map for November's election that was more equal than the one that would have given Republicans 10 of the state's 13 seats, the judges labeled it "interim."

# Affordable Housing Gets Boost—CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

housing funds. Another \$70 billion is needed for public housing repairs.

So far, more than \$11 billion from the state and local fiscal recovery funds have been committed to housing-related programs, according to the Center, which is tracking spending.

States in the West, Midwest and East have already made significant commitments, according to a February report from the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Southern states, long known for having among the weakest tenant protections, have committed very little.

Among the biggest areas of investment is a promise to build more affordable housing.

Massachusetts has allotted nearly \$600 million to affordable housing, including \$150 million for new housing and \$150 million to maintain public housing. Colorado lawmakers have proposed spending \$400 million and Washington, D.C., has set aside \$323 million, including \$17 million for community groups to provide housing for victims of domestic

violence. Clark County, Nevada, home to Las Vegas, whose tourist economy was hammered by the pandemic, plans to spend more than a third of its funds, or \$157 million, on housing.

Others states, led by Washington, Oregon and New Jersey, are working to shore up their eviction protections — something the U.S. Treasury Department has encouraged.

Washington is spending \$403 million to bolster its emergency rental assistance program and \$174 million for homeowner assistance. New York City plans to spend nearly \$329 million to increase access to rental assistance vouchers. New Jersey is spending \$750 million in rental and utility assistance and creating a statewide eviction prevention program.

"A lot of people who never thought they would be housing unstable ... are in this situation. And so it is scary and people don't know quite where to turn," said Janel Winter, the director of New Jersey's Division of Housing and Community Resources.

"This provides them with that assistance. ... So everybody who is in that court understands their rights, understands their responsibilities, is able to take advantage of whatever protections are there for them."

Several communities are using the funds to help the homeless.

North Carolina has set aside \$15 million to rapidly rehouse people at risk of homelessness because of the pandemic. Clark County, Washington, is spending \$4.4 million to fund homeless outreach teams while Burlington, Vermont, plans to use \$1.4 million on 30 shelter pods for people to sleep in and store their belongings.

Austin, Texas, which has hundreds of homeless encampments and upwards of 2,500 people sleeping on the street most nights, is putting more than \$106 million towards homelessness. That is in addition to the \$110 million that Travis County, home to Austin, is putting towards the problem.

The funds will help move the homeless into temporary housing and eventually into permanent

units that offer services like counseling and rental assistance. There is also funding for 1,300 new housing units set aside for the homeless and the city has acquired several hotels with the money.

"We are focused on building a system that doesn't just move people off the streets into shelters but is focused on resolving their housing crisis," said Dianna Grey, the city's homeless strategy officer.

Several cities are using the funds to save homes battered by years of neglect and to ensure impoverished families can remain housed. Milwaukee wants to spend \$15 million to rehabilitate up to 150 city-owned, foreclosed houses.

Detroit has set aside more than \$83 million for housing-related spending, including \$27.5 million to repair 1,000 roofs — tripling the amount it spends on its low-income home-repair program. It's also spending \$14.2 million to renovate vacant homes and \$6.4 million to set up an online system allowing residents to find and apply for low-income housing.

# No Explanation For Replacement Of Judge

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

A retired judge who has managed longstanding litigation on K-12 education spending in North Carolina for years said he's received no direct explanation why he's not handling the next portion of the case.

Superior Court Judge David Lee has been overseeing the lawsuit called "Leandro" since late 2016. But this week state Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul Newby instead assigned special Superior Court Judge Mike Robinson to evaluate school spending in a new state budget law in light of Lee's November order directing \$1.75 billion be moved from state coffers to government agencies.

Lee had ruled that the money had to fund a remedial spending plan through mid-2023 to help provide a constitutionally mandated "opportunity for a sound basic education" for at-risk chil-

dren and those in poor regions. Republican legislative leaders said he had overstepped his powers by appropriating funds, which is a duty of the General Assembly. A state Court of Appeals later blocked the revenue transfer.

On Monday, the same day that it was revealed the state Supreme Court had agreed to fast-track appeals of the case, Newby issued an order telling Robinson to conduct the budget review and alter Lee's order, if necessary, within 30 days. Robinson held a video conference call with parties in the lawsuit Thursday to schedule collecting data deadlines and in-person arguments for April 13.

Graham Wilson, a spokesperson for the Administrative Office of the Courts, said Wednesday that Lee had reached the mandatory retirement age for judges, which is 72. Judges who reach that age, however, can continue to preside over cases, with a

chief justice's approval. Wilson said he had no additional information when asked whether Lee's age was Newby's specific reason for the change.

Lee, from Union County, was named by then-Gov. Pat McCrory as an emergency Superior Court judge after he stepped down from his elected bench post in 2016. The day after his 72nd birthday in late January, Lee said he received a call from the court system stating that he was now a "recall" judge whose work would be at Newby's discretion.

Although Lee has received a commission to preside over at least one pending case, he felt that his future with the Leandro matter was uncertain until he saw Robinson's assignment.

"I've never gotten any formal notice or explanation," Lee told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday. Asked why he believes the change occurred, he added: "My guess on that is as good as yours." But he said

Newby is "perfectly at liberty" under the rules to do so.

Lee is a registered Democrat. Robinson and Newby are Republicans.

Lee, who had taken over managing the Leandro case after the retirement of Superior Court Judge Howard Manning, said he never expected to see this case through to completion. The lawsuit—named for one of the original plaintiffs—was filed in 1994. It led to landmark state Supreme Court decisions in both 1997 and 2004.

Lee, a longtime civil litigation attorney who was first appointed to the bench in 2003, acknowledged criticisms by GOP leaders. But he said it's always been his job to do what he thinks is right based on the law.

"I didn't intend to make this another career case," Lee said. "The case is not about the judge... It should be about these parties and the attorneys for these parties."

# Lieutenant Governor Explains Abortion Decision

By Gary D. Robertson

Associated Press

Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, a recent rising force in North Carolina Republican politics and a vocal abortion opponent, confirmed Thursday that he and his future wife decided to get an abortion more than 30 years ago.

Robinson and his wife, Yolanda, appeared in a video to address a social media post the lieutenant governor said he wrote 10 years ago—years before entering politics—but had gained attention this week.

"Before we were married and before we had kids. We had an abortion," Robinson says in the video. "It was the hardest decision we have ever made and sadly, we made the wrong one."

Any elected official talking about such a personal event is unusual. Robinson, who was elected the state's first Black lieutenant governor in 2020, has spoken out ardently against abortion.

In the video, Robinson cited a "resurfaced" Facebook post "where I referenced paying for an abortion."

Yolanda Robinson does not



speak in the 76-second video, but her husband says the decision to have the abortion "has been with us ever since."

"It's because of this experience and our spiritual journey that we are so adamantly pro-life," he adds. "We know what it's like to be in that situation. We know the pain that an abortion causes." He also talks about how their Christian faith has sustained them.

"No one is perfect, but no one is too far gone to be saved," Robinson says.

Robinson, a favorite of national and social conservatives, has said he's fairly certain that he'll run for governor in 2024.

Individual Republicans praised him this week for speaking out about a difficult experience.

"How can leaders proclaim repentance to this chaotic world? This is how," U.S. Rep. Dan Bishop of Charlotte wrote in a tweet Thursday. "A public confession many years before emerging into public life. Unblinking acknowledgment now. How refreshing."

The state Democratic Party said Robinson's past accentuated the need for the right to an abortion.

"Everyone needs access to abortion, even Mark Robinson," spokesperson Rachel Stein said in a news release Wednesday.

Robinson is a former factory worker who vaulted to prominence following a gun-rights speech in Greensboro that went viral. His 2020 campaign was his first.

"There is no greater mission on Earth than standing up for the most defenseless among us," Robinson said at an anti-abortion rally in Raleigh in early 2021, according to local media "We cannot say that Black lives matter or all lives matter or blue lives matter until we say unborn lives matter, because that is where it all starts."

While in office, Robinson also has attacked what he calls the "indoctrination" of children in the public schools and backed legislation that limited how teachers can discuss certain racial concepts in the classroom.

Many have also criticized Robinson for statements about sex education in public schools that they say disparaged LGBTQ people. Robinson has not apologized, saying his comments were critical of the reading materials, and that he could separate his religious views about sexuality from his elected position.

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# Business & Finance

## After Years Of Rivalry, Uber Puts NYC Taxicabs On Its App

By Michelle Chapman

AP Business Writer

Uber, hit by driver shortages and a surge in food delivery requests during the pandemic, will list New York City taxi cabs on its app, a partnership that until recently would have been unthinkable with both camps fighting ferociously for the same customers.

After a period in which waits for an Uber ride grew longer due to a driver shortage, the partnership will boost the number of rides available, and it gives NYC cab drivers access to a massive pool of commuters with an Uber app on their phones.

There had been hints tensions between Uber and taxi services had begun to thaw as Uber expanded aggressively into the very lucrative food delivery business and needed a growing supply of delivery drivers.

During the pandemic, Uber's food deliveries outpaced rides given to humans as millions sheltered at home. Gross bookings for delivery services at Uber reached \$13.4 billion in the final quarter of 2021. That's compared with \$11.3 billion in gross bookings for Uber rides.

The agreement announced Thursday comes amid the back drop of more cities moving to regulate the explosive growth of Uber and other app-based ride services, including New York City, which placed a temporary cap on new licenses for ride-hailing services in 2018.

New York City is the largest American market for Uber.

The New York City Workers Alliance, a group that represents taxi drivers and has been critical of Uber and other ride-hailing apps, said it would push for negotiations.

"After its business model has shown the failures to protect drivers from ridership down-



**CORONAVIRUS MAKES STRANGE BEDFELLOWS—The COVID-19 virus has left both taxis and Uber ride-sharing service with a shortage of drivers. Faced with increased wait times and frustrated passengers, Uber last week decided to add New York taxicabs to its app, a move that was previously unheard-of.**

turns and rising gas prices, Uber is returning to its roots: yellow cabs," Bhairavi Desai, the executive director of the NYCWA, said in a prepared statement Thursday.

The New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission said Thursday that it's always interested in tools that can provide more economic opportunities for drivers.

"We are excited about any proposal to more easily connect passengers with taxis and look forward to learning more about this agreement between Uber and the taxi apps and ensuring it complies with TLC rules," said Ryan Wanttaja, acting commissioner.

One industry analyst who follows Uber closely went so far as to call the marriage of longtime competitors "pure genius." Uber

lacked drivers in New York City and taxi drivers lacked the business due to the popularity of

ride-hailing apps.

"I think they realized that they both need each other over the short term," said Bill Selesky, senior analyst for Argus Research.

Uber Technologies Inc. has incorporated taxi drivers around the world into its system for the past several years. In Spain, the company has integrated taxis in Madrid, Málaga, Valencia and Barcelona. It's teamed in Colombia with TaxExpress, which has more than 2,300 active drivers. Half of all Uber taxi trips in Latin America come from the TaxExpress partnership in Colombia. Uber also has relationships with taxi software and fleet operators in Austria, Germany, Turkey, South Korea and Hong Kong.

In New York City, Uber is teaming with tech platforms Creative Mobile Technologies and Curb to eventually have all New York City taxi cabs available on

its app.

Anyone with the Uber app will have access to thousands of yellow taxis that operate on the CMT/Arro platform. Taxi drivers will see Uber-originated fares on their driver monitors which they already use to service e-hails from the Arro taxi app.

"Uber has a long history of partnering with the taxi in-

dustry to provide drivers with more ways to earn and riders with another transportation option. Our partnerships with taxis look different around the world, and we're excited to team up with taxi software companies CMT and Curb, which will benefit taxi drivers and all New Yorkers," Andrew Macdonald, senior vice presi-

dent, Mobility and Business Operations, at Uber, said in a prepared statement.

Creative Mobile Technologies said Thursday that taxi drivers on its platform, which includes the taxi app Arro, will gain access to Uber's customer base, giving them the opportunity for a higher volume of trips and expanded revenue.

## Towns Add Electric Car Chargers

By Wayne Parry

Associated Press

ASBURY PARK, N.J. (AP)—A wave of new electric vehicle charging stations across the country is coming as interest in alternatives to gasoline-powered vehicles is on the rise and could heighten further due to a global spike in gasoline prices.

Though most of the plans were in the works before already high gas prices surged because of the war in Ukraine, the timing may work in favor of electric vehicle makers and other proponents of ditching fossil fuels.

From coast to coast, cities big and small are adding charging stations for electric vehicles. Strong demand is forecast for the vehicles, despite their higher prices and limited availability, meaning even more communities will feel pressure to add charging stations or risk having motorists pass them by in favor of plug-in-friendly places.

The publicly funded investments come as gasoline prices in most of the country are above \$4

a gallon and significantly more in some spots.

Last week, New Jersey officials awarded \$1 million in grants to install electric vehicle charging stations in 24 tourist areas around the state. The idea was to help spur tourism by reassuring visitors who own electric vehicles that they can come to a vacation spot in New Jersey and not run out of power to get back home.

"Don't worry about it," said Joseph Fiordaliso, president of the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. "We have the equipment here so that you don't have to have range anxiety."

Spots getting money for new charging stations include Asbury Park, Atlantic City, Ocean City and several state parks and forests.

The money comes from the state budget. Last Tuesday, NJ Transit, the state's public transportation agency, unveiled electric charging stations at a bus depot in Camden, outside Philadelphia.

There are now about 625 vehicle charging stations in New

Jersey

On the federal side, the city of Hoboken, just outside New York City, is getting up to six new charging stations in a deal also announced Monday. U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez said the money from a federal spending bill "will help ease our transition to electric vehicles, reduce emissions, and create a cleaner environment for our children."

Governments across the country are doing likewise. Bellingham, Wash. will add 90 charging stations over the next two years. Portland, Maine, recently entered into a 10-year agreement with a company that will install, operate and maintain more than 40 electric vehicle charging stations on publicly owned property.

Charleston, W.Va. just added two charging stations at a public parking garage. Charlotte, N.C., Cleveland and Saginaw, Mich., are among cities adding charging stations.

It's happening in other countries, too. Glasgow, Scotland, is adding 164 new stations this year.

## Biden Seeks Tax Increase For The Wealthy

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden intends to propose a minimum tax of 20% on households worth more than \$100 million and cut projected budget deficits by more than \$1 trillion over the next decade, according to a fact sheet released Saturday by the White House budget office.

The introduction of the minimum tax on the wealthiest Americans would represent a significant reorienting of the tax code. It would apply to the top 0.01% of households with half of the expected revenue coming from households worth \$1 billion or more. The minimum tax would effectively prevent the wealthiest sliver of America from paying lower rates than families who think of themselves as middle class, while helping to generate revenues to fuel Biden's domestic ambitions and keep the deficit in check relative to the U.S. economy.

In his proposal expected Monday, the lower deficits also reflect the economy's resurgence as the United States emerges from the pandemic. It's a sign that the government's balance sheet will improve after a historic burst of spending to combat the coronavirus.

The fading of the pandemic and the growth has enabled the deficit to fall from \$3.1 trillion in fiscal 2020 to \$2.8 trillion last year and a projected \$1.4 trillion this year. That deficit spending paid off in the form of the economy expanding at a 5.7% pace last year, the strongest growth since 1984. But inflation at a 40-year

high also accompanied those robust gains as high prices have weighed on Biden's popularity.

For the Biden administration, the proposal for the budget year that begins Oct. 1 shows that the burst of spending helped to fuel growth and put government finances in a more stable place for years to come as a result. One White House official, insisting on anonymity because the budget has yet to be released, said the proposal shows that Democrats can deliver on what Republicans have promised before without much success: faster growth and falling deficits.

Yet the Biden budget would pledge to do so through a kind of wealth tax that many Republicans say would hurt the economy by diminishing private investment in companies that create jobs and cause the wealthy to put their fortunes to work abroad.

Republican lawmakers have said that the Biden administration's spending over the past year has led to greater economic pain in the form of higher prices. The inflation that came with reopening the U.S. economy as the closures from the pandemic began to end has been amplified by supply chain issues, low interest rates and, now, disruptions in the oil and natural gas markets because of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky pinned the blame solely on Biden's coronavirus relief as well as his push to move away from fossil fuels.

"Washington Democrats' re-

sponse to these hardships has been as misguided as the war on American energy and runaway spending that helped create them," McConnell said last week. "The Biden administration seems to be willing to try anything but walking back their own disastrous economic policies."

Biden inherited from the Trump administration a budget deficit that was equal in size to 14.9% of the entire U.S. economy. But the deficit starting in the upcoming budget year will be below 5% of the economy, putting the country on a more sustainable path, according to people familiar with the budget proposal who insisted on anonymity to discuss forthcoming details.

The lower deficit totals will also be easier to manage even if interest rates rise.

The expected deficit decrease for fiscal 2022 reflects the solid recovery in hiring that occurred in large part because of Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package. The added jobs mean additional tax revenue, with the government likely collecting \$300 billion more in revenues compared to fiscal 2021, a 10% increase.

Still, the country will face several uncertainties that could reshape Biden's proposed budget, which will have figures that don't include the spending omnibus recently signed into law. Biden and U.S. allies are also providing aid to Ukrainians who are fighting against Russian forces, a war that could possibly reshape spending priorities and the broader economic outlook.



## Doll Honoring Ida B. Wells Faces Uphill Battle Against Anti-Blackness

By Toni Sturdivant

Texas A&M

When Mattel announced in January 2022 that it was releasing a new Barbie doll to honor Ida B. Wells — the famed 19th-century Black journalist and anti-lynching crusader — the company said the idea was to "inspire us to dream big." However, while the doll may prove helpful to young Black children, its impact is likely to be limited.

Although diverse groups are sometimes represented accurately within print and digital media, racist portrayals of Black people still persist.

Young Black children can internalize racial messages from a variety of sources, including anti-Black messages from the media, interactions with peers and school practices, such as being disproportionately disciplined or suspended from school. This internalization can negatively impact young children's feelings about their race and others.

Black dolls, like the one of Wells, can shape the way young Black children understand their identity and affect how they see themselves in society, but only to a limited degree.

Wells was a noteworthy activist from Holly Springs, Mississippi, who was born into slavery in 1862 and was later emancipated as a child. She attended a segregated Black school and became a teacher in Memphis, Tennessee, until she was fired in 1891 for speaking out against subpar learning conditions. A staunch activist, Wells similarly filed and initially won a lawsuit against the Chesapeake, Ohio & Southwestern Railroad Co. in 1884 after being forced out of a first-class train car despite having purchased a first-class ticket. The ruling was eventually overturned by the Tennessee Supreme Court and spurred the beginning of Wells' career as a

journalist.

Wells wrote about being discriminated against on the train in the Memphis weekly newspaper The Living Way. She became a columnist — writing under the name "Iola" — in 1889. From there, she began to write about lynching, as the part owner and editor of The Memphis Free Speech, a progressive Black newspaper of the time. She eventually organized a major anti-lynching campaign. Her work is a part of how people today know about the terrors of lynching at the turn of the 20th century.

Having a doll that honors Wells' legacy can help today's children "know they have the power" to bring about a better future, an Instagram account for Barbie said in a post. However, the mere existence of a Black doll does not combat anti-Black racism. Representation alone does not equal racial justice or stop messages of anti-Blackness from existing.

Unfortunately, when there are competing narratives about race, children must then make

sense of the mixed messages, disregarding some and accepting and internalizing others as they form their own understandings. Therefore, children can benefit from receiving messages that contradict the anti-Blackness that they encounter as they form their opinions about race.

Children learn about race in many places and ways. The media is just one context, and toys represent an overlooked form of media. When it comes to dolls specifically, a wealth of research shows that simply presenting a child with a doll does not mean that they will be interested in it.

In my research study, I carefully selected two Black dolls, one white Latina doll and a white non-Hispanic doll from the Hearts for Hearts doll line. These dolls piqued the interest of the 4-year-old participants in my study. Out of the 13 children, eight were Black, two were white, one was Latina, and two were Asian.

In seeing the set of dolls as a group, the children could not wait to play with them; but



### Classifieds



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# Opinion



## The Third Day of Confirmation Hearings Reveal Two Troubling Reasons GOP Senators Oppose Judge Jackson

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

The constant badgering and apparent lack of respect toward Supreme Court Justice nominee Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson during 13 hours of testimony on Tuesday and throughout Wednesday only revealed two essential reasons why Republican senators oppose the D.C. jurist. First, she's the pick of President Joe Biden, a Democrat. Second, and more troubling, Judge Jackson is a Black woman.

"Many Republican members of the Senate Judiciary Committee are wasting no time embracing the kind of bad-faith scrutiny often reserved for women and Black nominees—beneficiaries of affirmative action, in one GOP senator's parlance," Political Analyst Brandon Tensley wrote in an analysis for CNN.

"Some Republicans, lacking a coherent strategy, are pressing Jackson for her views on The 1619 Project and the children's book *Antiracist Baby*—because 'critical race theory,' though neither has anything to do with the job she's being considered for," Tensley determined. "Others are trying with great effort to cast the nominee as weak on crime by distorting her past work defending Guantanamo Bay detainees and her sentencing in child pornography cases." If confirmed, Judge Jackson would emerge as the first Black woman to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court. In questioning Judge Jackson, South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham continued the theme of his GOP colleagues, claiming the jurist is weak on crime—specifically regarding defendants charged in child pornography cases. Repeatedly interrupting Judge Jackson's responses and egregiously misstating her position, Sen. Graham suggested the judge didn't consider computer usage a sentencing enhancement. Her face displaying disbelief in the senator's behavior, Judge Jackson remarked that she not only sends offenders to prison but orders lengthy periods of supervision following their release.

"Senator, all I'm trying to explain is that our sentencing system, the system that Congress has created, the system that the sentencing commission is the steward of, is a rational one," Judge Jackson stated. "It's a system designed to help judges do justice in these terrible circumstances by eliminating unwarranted disparities and ensuring that the most serious defendants get the longest periods of time in prison. 'What we are trying to do is be rational in dealing with some of the most horrible kinds of behavior.'"

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell claimed Judge Jackson was evasive in a floor speech. "Judge Jackson is receiving a calm, respectful process, unlike the treatment that Senate Democrats typically inflict on Republican presidents' nominees," McConnell decided. "But unfortunately, thus far, many of Judge Jackson's responses have been evasive and unclear. She's declined to address critically important questions and ameliorate real concerns."

However, Sen. Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York praised Judge Jackson. "At times, the judge also displayed one of her greatest traits: her grace and poise, even when Republicans asked intentionally misleading questions," Schumer remarked on the Senate floor. "Republicans tried to land a blow, but Judge Jackson kept her cool." When Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) attempted to get Judge Jackson's position on *Roe v. Wade*, the jurist noted that the Supreme Court is currently considering efforts to overturn that law, making it inappropriate for her to comment. Sen. Cornyn pressed, asking, "What does viability mean when it comes to an unborn child in your understanding?" The Judge responded: "I hesitate to speculate. I know that it is a point in time that the court has identified in terms of when—the standards that apply to regulation of the right," Judge Jackson responded. Cornyn shot back: "No one suggests that a 20-week-old fetus can live independently outside the mother's womb, do they?" Cornyn asked. To which she responded: "Senator, I'm not a biologist," she replied. "What I know is that the Supreme Court has tests and standards that it's applied when it evaluates regulation of the right of a woman to terminate their pregnancy. The court has announced that there is a right to terminate, up to the point of viability, subject to the framework of *Roe*, and there is a pending case that is addressing these issues."

Another Republican, Sen. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, suggested Judge Jackson was too compassionate for the Supreme Court. "It seems as though you're a very kind person, and there's at least a level of empathy that enters into your treatment of a defendant that some could view as may be beyond what some of us would be comfortable with, with respect to administering justice," Sen. Tillis said, piggybacking off colleagues like Sen. Graham who called the judge a "nice person."

Judge Jackson disputed Sen. Tillis' assessment. "I follow the statute that applies to judges that Congress has set forward, including the nature and circumstances of the offense, the history of the character and characteristics of the defendant," Judge Jackson stated. When belligerent Texas Republican Ted Cruz attacked Judge Jackson and demanded that, if confirmed, she recuses herself from an affirmative action case involving Harvard University, the judge said she planned to sit out that decision. Judge Jackson sits on Harvard's Board of Overseers. Sen. Cruz defiantly ignored Judiciary Committee Chair Dick Durbin's (D-Illinois) repeated admonition to allow Judge Jackson to answer his questions and that his time expired. Sen. Cruz asked Judge Jackson to define a woman, shouting that she's the only nominee not able to answer that question. "I know that I'm a woman," Judge Jackson retorted. Democrats hope to keep its caucus together in voting for Judge Jackson's confirmation. Without any GOP support, Democrats need all 50 senators to confirm Judge Jackson, elevating her as the first Black woman to sit on the U.S. Supreme Court.



## The People Of Yemen Suffer Atrocities, Too

By Kathy Kelly

World Beyond War

The ghastly blockade and bombardment of Yemen, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, is now entering its eighth year. The United Nations estimated last fall that the Yemen death toll would top 377,000 people by the end of 2021.

The United Nations' goal was to raise more than \$4.2 billion for the people of war-torn Yemen by March 15. But when that deadline rolled around, just \$1.3 billion had come in.

"I am deeply disappointed," said Jan Egeland, the secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council. "The people of Yemen need the same level of support and solidarity that we've seen for the people of Ukraine. The crisis in Europe will dramatically impact Yemenis' access to food and fuel, making an already dire situation even worse."

With Yemen importing more than 35 percent of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine, disruption to wheat supplies will cause soaring increases in the price of food.

"Since the onset of the Ukraine conflict, we have seen the prices of food skyrocket by more than 150 percent," said Basheer Al Selwi, a spokesperson for the International Commission of the Red Cross in Yemen. "Millions of Yemeni families don't know how to get their next meal."

The United States continues to supply spare parts for Saudi/UAE coalition war planes, along with maintenance and a steady flow of armaments. Without this support, the Saudis couldn't continue their murderous aerial attacks.

Yet tragically, instead of condemning atrocities committed by the Saudi/UAE invasion, bombing and blockade of Yemen, the United States is cozying up to the leaders of these countries. As sanctions against Russia disrupt global oil sales, the United States is entering talks to become increasingly reliant on Saudi and UAE oil production. And Saudi Arabia and the UAE don't want to increase their oil production without a U.S. agreement to help them increase their attacks against Yemen.

Human rights groups have decried the Saudi/UAE-led coalition for bombing roadways, fisheries, sewage and sanitation facilities, weddings, funerals and even a children's school bus. In a recent attack, the Saudis killed 60 African migrants held in a detention center in Saada.

The Saudi blockade of Yemen has choked off essential imports needed for daily life, forcing the Yemeni people to depend on relief groups for survival.

There is another way. U.S. Reps. Pramila Jayapal of Washington and Peter De Fazio of Oregon, both Democrats, are now seeking cosponsors for the Yemen War Powers Resolution. It demands that Congress cut military support for the Saudi/UAE-led coalition's war against Yemen.

On March 12, Saudi Arabia executed 81 people, including seven Yemenis—two of them prisoners of war and five of them accused of criticizing the Saudi war against Yemen.

Just two days after the mass execution, the Gulf Corporation Council, including many of the coalition partners attacking Yemen, announced Saudi willingness to host peace talks in their own capital city of Riyadh, requiring Yemen's Ansar Allah leaders (informally known as Houthis) to risk execution by Saudi Arabia in order to discuss the war.

The Saudis have long insisted on a deeply flawed U.N. resolution which calls on the Houthi fighters to disarm but never even mentions the U.S. backed Saudi/UAE coalition as being among the warring parties. The Houthis say they will come to the negotiating table but cannot rely on the Saudis as mediators. This seems reasonable, given Saudi Arabia's vengeful treatment of Yemenis.

The people of the United States have the right to insist that U.S. foreign policy be predicated on respect for human rights, equitable sharing of resources and an earnest commitment to end all wars. We should urge Congress to use the leverage it has for preventing continued aerial bombardment of Yemen and sponsor Jayapal's and De Fazio's forthcoming resolution.

We can also summon the humility and courage to acknowledge U.S. attacks against Yemeni civilians, make reparations and repair the dreadful systems undergirding our unbridled militarism.

*Kathy Kelly is an author, co-coordinates the Ban Killer Drones campaign, and is board president of World Beyond War.*



## Freedom, Our Brains On Social Media, Disinformation, WMD, Nazis

By Tom H. Hastings

Portland State University

Each human on Earth seems to have a social media identity as unique as a fingerprint, so we all see what the cybergods algorithmically feed us.

(Disclaimer: I am a social scientist, not a brain scientist.)

One driver is conflict, especially negative, destructive interactions. People seem to feel that sitting in their home behind locked doors is the perfect time to insult, threaten, demean, and just generally crudely attack others.

Another driver, which fits into the first one in many cases as part of an amplifying feedback loop, is "news" that is crafted to outrage. When we read something that makes us mad, we tend to engage on the platform that brought us that news. Our eyeballs, so to speak, are thus delivered to advertisers.

And of course there is confirmation bias. When we like or love a post, the digital demons file that knowledge into our relentlessly updating cyberprint and we are fed more of the same.

So what we hate the most and what we like the most is what we get. Social media seems to be creating our own personal polarizing instrumentalities. Nice.

For at least some folks, social media is addictive, triggering dopamine into our brain's reward pathways, say the neurobiologists.

Most humans want to replicate those bursts of reward, and of connection with others who tend to support, praise, agree, and compliment them. So, we can become poseurs, reposting, retweeting terribly incorrect information that our favorite people like, love, share, and comment on with the approbation we seek.

And sure enough, we have some regions of the net amplifying and exaggerating disinformation, such as "Ukraine is a paragon of freedom and one of the most democratic countries on earth," or, conversely, "Ukraine is riddled top to bottom with Nazis."

The former statement naturally increases outrage at Putin.

The latter statement naturally excuses Putin.

Neither is true.

Looking at one of the most unbiased examiners of measures of freedom in the world's nation-states, Freedom House, they rank the least free countries as Syria, South Sudan, and Tibet, barely better in that respect than North Korea, Turkmenistan, Eritrea, Western Sahara, and Eastern Donbas—the last two of which are not actual nation-states but rather territories, at least currently.

The most free countries, by Freedom House rankings, are Sweden, Norway, and Finland, followed closely by New Zealand, Canada, Ireland, and Uruguay. The rankings are based on 100 possible points, and the worst are just 1–4 points, with the best at 97–100.

Freedom House links to their methodology so you can judge for yourself how much stock you place in it, though they have been doing these rankings for decades. Newer similar ranking systems have similar results.

The U.S. just a few years ago had rankings routinely in the mid-90s and we were usually in the top 10 most free countries in the world. Now (latest rankings only reflect through the end of 2020), after four years of Trump, the U.S. slid precipitously approximately 12 points, down to 83 points in the 100-point scale. We are now ranked number 62, less free than 61 other countries.

Of the 210 countries and territories they rank, Ukraine is more in the middle, with a score of 61 points, rated "partly free" nearly the same as Liberia and Madagascar.

Russia is in the not free group, with just 19 points out of 100.

We hear justifications, excuses, and many convoluted reasons for Putin invading Ukraine, just as we heard excuses for the 9.11.2001 attacks on the US.

Yes, there are reasons. But none are good enough unless we suspend all ethics, morals, and compassion in favor of a litany of criticisms of NATO, of Germany and the U.S. in particular, and unless we ingenuously swallow Putin's lies about needing to de-Nazify Ukraine and his lies about WMD in Ukraine.

Yes, there are Nazis in Ukraine, but none more egregious than Putin's repressive, militaristic regime. No, Nazis do not control Ukraine. Meanwhile, Nazis demonstrate openly, brazenly, in the U.S., simultaneously holding swastikas and pro-Trump signs, including in the attack on the Capitol last year. Do we give Putin a pass to invade the U.S.? Yeah, didn't think so.

WMD in Ukraine? Again, this is projection. Russia has nukes, chemical weapons, and even biological weapons today and Ukraine does not—as we should all know, Ukraine had thousands of nukes when it seceded from the Soviet Union and signed a treaty with Russia to give them all the nuclear weapons in exchange for Russia's promise to respect Ukraine's sovereignty.

Maybe Putin should give back the nukes, since he broke the promise on Ukrainian sovereignty.

Putin's lies may tragically be promoted in order to set the stage for a truly horrific false flag event that would literally benefit nobody, not even him. If he is still capable of thinking strategically he will realize this.

*Dr. Tom H. Hastings is Coördinator of Conflict Resolution BA/BS degree programs and certificates at Portland State University, and on occasion an expert witness for the defense of civil resisters in court.*



## Burglary Can't Stop Oakland Post

By Stacy M. Brown

NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent

Paul Cobb has experienced setbacks and uphill battles before. As a young man, he eagerly joined the voter registration fights in Selma and boldly spoke out for civil rights. For 39 years, Cobb served as a newspaper columnist, putting pen to paper on some of the most pressing issues in the Black community.

When he purchased the *Oakland Post* in 2004, Cobb immediately ordered an audit of the newspaper and determined never to miss a deadline.

So, it's little wonder that following a late-night break-in at the *Oakland Post* on Wednesday, March 23, Cobb remained firm in his resolve. "We have never missed getting the newspaper out, and this will not stop us either," he said in a telephone call with NNPA Newswire.

"We are racing over time, but we will get the newspaper out," he insisted. A burglar entered Cobb's *Oakland Post*, leaving the downtown office in disarray and covered in glass. Reportedly, police have obtained video of the incident that includes the suspect.

"The place was ransacked," Cobb remarked, adding that it appeared the thief attempted to steal a television, some computers, and rifled through files and desks.

A National Newspaper Publishers Association member, attorney Thomas L. Berkley, and wife Velda M. Berkley founded the paper in 1963. With a weekly publication run, the newspaper remains dedicated to covering African-Americans' major issues in Oakland—education, civil rights, crime, employment, and the fight against racism. According to the *Post's* website, the newspaper became the largest African-American newspaper in Northern California, circulating over 55,000.

In addition, it counted as the central paper of the Post Newspaper Group, which included five Bay Area newspapers, including the *Richmond Post* and the Spanish language newspaper *El Mundial*.

In 1972 the newspaper moved its business offices and printing facilities from Berkeley, Calif. to 630 20th St. in Oakland, Calif. Following Thomas Berkley's death, Cobb purchased the *Post* in 2004. A community organizer who once led the Oakland Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal and served as a mayoral appointee on the Board of Education,

Cobb said the burglary proved disconcerting. It also occurred only weeks after officials renamed a part of 14th Street after Chauncey Bailey, the late *Post* reporter killed in 2007. "I'm happy none of our staff was hurt," Cobb stated. "I'm ready to go to press now."